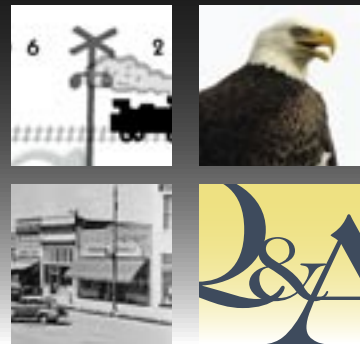




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QUESTIONS



area including residents on Lovelace Road and US 29. The extension of Gabbettville Road across I-85 would also maintain adequate access between US 29 and the east side of I-85.

WHAT happens to my comments about the project?

All concerns and comments received from public outreach efforts have been evaluated to determine the need to modify the project. In addition to concerns from the public there are over 30 different resource types that must be evaluated in the environmental analysis process, including history, noise, ecology, community (homes, businesses, parks, schools, churches, government), to note a few. Based upon the results of the evaluation of potential impacts to these resources it was determined that the preferred alternative had the least impact on environmental and community resources while still meeting the project need and purpose. ■

WILL the traffic from the proposed development cause congestion on the local road network in the area?

GDOT in conjunction with Troup County is presently completing a county wide transportation planning study. One of the main purposes of the study is to determine how the transportation system would function in the future as the county continues to grow. In addition to this overall system analysis GDOT has committed to complete a detailed traffic analysis of the project area to determine what specific roadway improvements are required to handle the projected economic development beyond this project and ensure a properly functioning local roadway network.

WILL construction limit the access to my driveway?

GDOT will ensure that all residents and businesses have continued access to their properties during construction.

WHAT will be done about access between US 29 and the east side of I-85? Could there be a connection from Lovelace Road to the proposed frontage road?

Providing access to the site from Lovelace Road does not meet the project purpose of providing safe, efficient access to the site from I-85. It is projected that the main flow of traffic to the site will utilize I-85 to access the site from the proposed interchange or at existing Exit 2. With the addition of the new interchange on I-85, access to the interstate would be improved for the entire

ONCE I BUILT A RAILROAD

“The time will come when people will travel in stages moved by steam engines from one city to another, almost as fast as birds can fly, 15 or 20 miles an hour... A carriage will start from Washington in the morning, the passengers will breakfast at Baltimore, dine at Philadelphia, and sup in New York the same day... Engines will drive boats 10 or 12 miles an hour, and there will be hundreds of steamers running on the Mississippi, as predicted years ago.”

— Oliver Evans, 1800

Railroads changed America in the early 1800s beyond mere advances in transportation. Railroads also shaped the development of business and industry, and influenced the establishment of communities. Locally, the arrival of railroads in LaGrange and West Point brought many people, opportunities, and diversification to the area.

The Atlanta and West Point Railroad (AWP) was originally chartered in 1847 as the Atlanta and LaGrange Rail Road. The section from Newnan to West Point was chartered in December 1849, which allowed the entire line to be completed by May, 1854. The 80-mile line from East

Point, located about six miles southwest of Atlanta, to LaGrange and West Point began using the name AWP in 1857. Once completed, it became a key link in the South's 1200-mile through route from Alexandria, Virginia to Mobile, Alabama and a major boost to Atlanta's emergence as a rail center. Unfortunately, the railroad system was also the primary purpose for the Union to concern themselves with West Point during the Civil War.

Using the rail system in West Point had always been a cumbersome and complicated process due a discrepancy in track widths. The Montgomery & West Point Railroad (MWP) had a track width of four feet and eight inches that joined the AWP, with a track width of five feet. This difference in gauge widths required every train passing through West Point to completely offload and reload its cargo onto the equipment of the other line. Transporting goods across the dock platform from one train to another took manpower and time. In many cases, goods had to be sheltered to await the next train. This was a time consuming process that caused many problems. On the positive side, this process put West Point on the map and caused its growth as a major train juncture.

In April 1865, the railroad system that passed through West Point became designated as a primary target for Union forces, since the destruction of the rail system would crush the south's ability to transport goods, troops, and ammunition for the war. For weeks, the advancement of Federal



troops had forced train loads of equipment, supplies, refugees and Confederate troops to be sent eastward to West Point on the MWP. Workers tried their best to get trains through West Point quickly, but the significant increase in activity created a backlog of trains. Consequently, storage sheds, warehouses, and sidings filled as trains scurried through the area.

Eventually, the AWP made the decision to withdraw all of its equipment to Atlanta in order to protect what remained. A very small remnant of equipment continued to operate but only at the southernmost end, in and around West Point. This move effectively turned the bottleneck in West Point into a dead end. Trains continued to arrive in West Point from the west, but there was nowhere else to send them, and no time to off-load the cargo and hide it. Fully-loaded flat cars and boxcars were parked on every inch of available track throughout West Point. A massive accumulation of goods was just waiting for the taking and was easily captured when Fort Tyler fell.

All facilities, stock and inventory at northern rail yard were destroyed. At the downtown rail yard and adjacent freight



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depots, the Federals began to burn all they had captured there. Plumes of smoke rose high into the sky from both locations and were visible for miles. At final count, the Federals had destroyed 19 engines, 245 flat cars and box cars, and both of the railroad's depots. The MWP sections were the hardest hit. Union troops had caused damage to the line while in route to West Point and additionally while there. Later, estimates would put the total damage to the railroad and equipment at \$1,616,243.

Repairs to the AWP in LaGrange were accomplished quickly, by the Fall of 1865. Ultimately, 14 of the 19 locomotives owned by the MWP were rebuilt and returned to service. From 1886 onward the AWP and the MWP operated jointly under the nickname "The West Point Route." An earlier nickname was "Atlanta and New Orleans Short Line." The former AWP line remains in full service today, though passenger service ended in the 1970s when Amtrak took over most of the nation's remaining passenger trains. The AWP name officially came to an end in 1983 when it was absorbed into the Seaboard System Railroad (SBD), and in 1986 SBD merged with Chessie System to form CSX Transportation. ■

SOURCES: <http://www.railga.com/atlwp.html>;
<http://www.forttyler.com/railroad.htm>

Next Steps

Following the December 14, 2006 Public Hearing Open House, GDOT and FHWA began to evaluate comments on the Preferred Alternative and to develop the Final Environmental Assessment. Based on the overall project analysis, which included the extensive public input, it appears that a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is the appropriate documentation to conclude the environmental process. The FONSI would be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment (EA/FONSI) and would include a summary of all comments received during the comment period, along with the GDOT responses to these comments. The EA/FONSI would also be updated to address commenter concerns, correct any technical errors and add relevant new information that has become available since the Draft EA was published.

As part of the EA/FONSI, the preferred alternative would be

modified to become the Selected Alternative, which would be further refined and evaluated to minimize impacts and detail potential mitigation options where avoidance or minimization is not feasible. Upon completion of the EA/FONSI, the document would be submitted to FHWA for final approval. The current schedule estimates that the FONSI will be approved in the spring of 2007.

Once the FONSI is approved, the interchange design plans can also be completed. The plans are being prepared as a Design/Build, which will allow the project to be constructed on an expedited schedule. Currently, it is anticipated that project construction could begin as early as Summer 2007. During construction, GDOT will use every reasonable measure to ensure a minimal impact on traffic. By Winter 2008, the project is scheduled to be completed and open to the traveling public. ■

The Eagle as Phoenix: Resurgence of a National Treasure

The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is truly an all-American bird. While our national symbol was in danger of extinction 30 years ago, the bald eagle has made a tremendous comeback. This recovery is due in part to its Federal listing as a threatened species and State listing as an endangered species. In recent years, its populations have greatly improved in numbers, productivity, and security.

Juvenile bald eagles have mottled brown and white plumage, gradually acquiring their dark brown body and distinctive white head and tail around 5 years of age. Bald eagles can live 15-25 years in the wild, and even longer in captivity. Species living in the northern range are larger than those in the south, and females are larger than males.

Bald eagles usually nest near bodies of water where foraging habitat can be found. The nest is usually in a large, open-topped pine near open water, but cypress trees are occasionally used. Nests are often 4 to 6 feet wide and may weigh up to 1,000 pounds. Nests are often re-used year after year, with additions to the nests made annually. Although bald eagles may range over great distances, they usually return to

nest within 125 miles of where they were raised. Breeding bald eagles typically mate for life. They lay one to three eggs once a year, which hatch after about 35 days. Young eagles are flying within 3 months and are on their own about a month later.

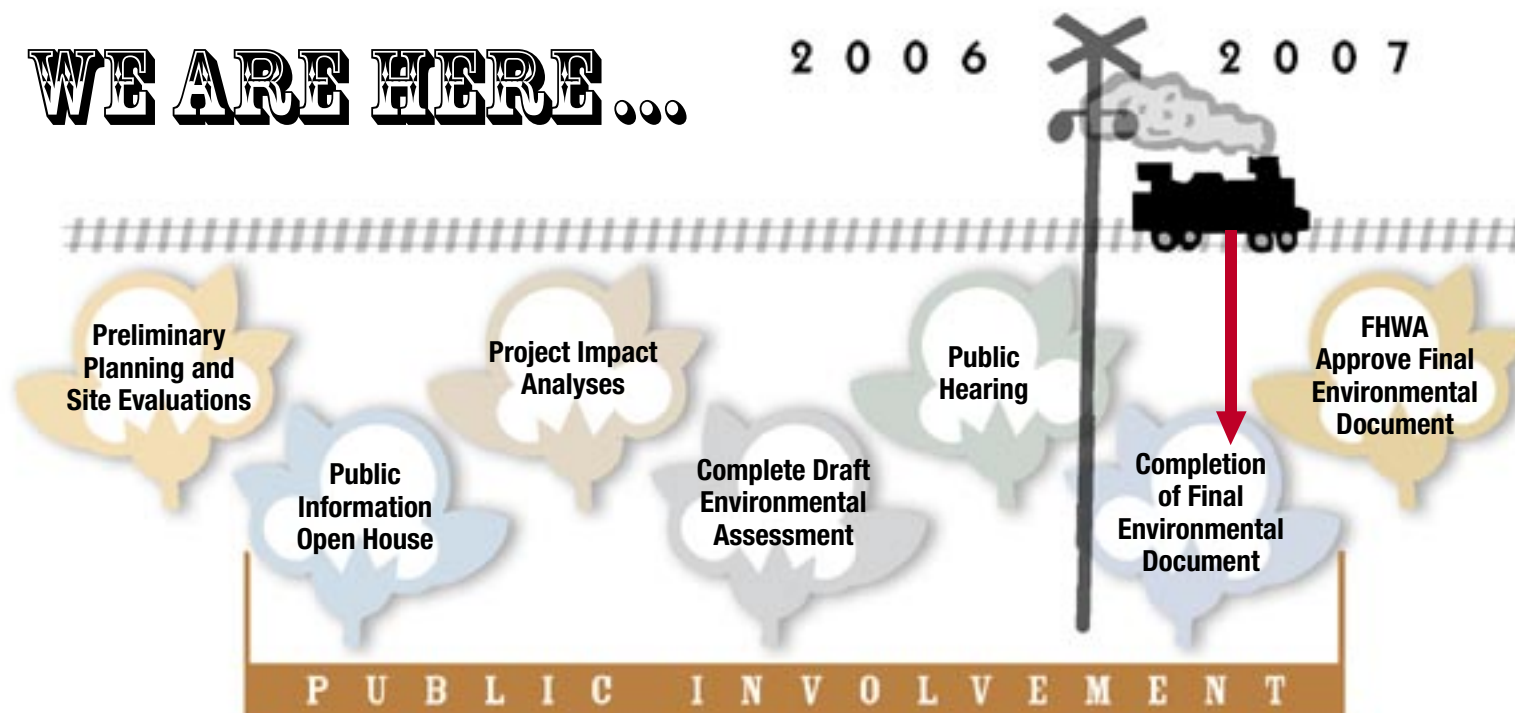
From the northern reaches of Alaska and Canada down to northern Mexico, the bald eagle resides over most of the continent. Known nesting activity in Georgia is



concentrated mainly along the coast and near major rivers, wetlands, and reservoirs in the southern and central portion of the state. In Troup County, a bald eagle occurrence has been recorded within three miles of the proposed project site. This information caused field personnel to readily evaluate habitats near the study corridor that may support the occurrence of protected species.

Field surveys for protected species were conducted based on the identification of preferred/suitable habitat for species known to occur in Troup County. If suitable habitat was identified within the study corridor, the proposed right of way (ROW) was thoroughly surveyed for the species of potential occurrence. Field studies were conducted in May of 2006. It was concluded that the proposed project would not impact any bald eagle nests and is not likely to negatively affect the species or its habitat.

Additional coordination with US Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act indicated that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle. Under the terms of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, federal agencies shall "ensure that any action authorized, funded or carried out by such agency is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species which is determined by the Secretary to be critical..." Therefore, special provisions for the protection of the bald eagle and neotropical migratory birds will be followed for additional protection of bald eagles during construction of the proposed project. ■



THANKS AGAIN FOR CONTRIBUTING!

Throughout the environmental process, the West Point 85 Interchange team has been committed to public involvement. The project's public involvement plan included numerous ways for people to learn more about the project, give comments, ask questions, offer suggestions and voice concerns. Some of the tools employed in the public involvement plan consisted of newsletters (such as this one), a project website, and Public Information Open Houses. As the planning process draws to a close, we hope that one of the many opportunities for public involvement allowed you to participate in the project development process.

The most recent opportunity for public participation was at the Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) which was held at the Gray Hill Community Center from 4 to 7 p.m. on December 14, 2006. At the PHOH, the project team was available to answer questions and to take comments on the planning process as a whole and the Draft

Environmental Assessment (EA). The PHOH provided the public an opportunity to review the results from the alternatives evaluation process, look over aerial maps of the study corridor, and most importantly to provide GDOT with comments on the overall EA, the Preferred Alternative and the project planning process.

More than 200 people attended the PHOH. Comments about the project were received on written comment forms, to the court reporter, and after the open house by letter. All comments received have been made part of the project's official transcript. All comments will be considered as the preferred alternative undergoes continued evaluation and refinement in the development of the Final EA.

Continue visiting the project website link on the GDOT homepage at www.dot.state.ga.us for the latest project information. ■